

## **Police Community Advisory Board Benefits**

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**Problem Statement:**

Beginning from 2015 until today, the country has experienced a soaring increase in the number of cases involving violence and mistrust between the police and the members of the community, the same people to whom the police have the task of protecting. Five police officers were killed in Dallas, Texas on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016 out of the same reasons (Williams, 2016). The police were killed as they were patrolling a protest staged by the Black Lives Matter crowd that was protesting the killing of two African-American men for what some perceived to be no reason by two policemen. This case was not isolated but one of the many similar incidences that have been coming up of late. It is a sign of a deeper imbalance in the society and a symbol of the decaying relationship between the community and the law enforcement systems (More, 2008). The people have grievances, rooted in their lack of trust for the officers and they perceive them as predators rather than protectors.

This has led to the need for a police advisory board consisting of members of the public, to work in partnership with law enforcement with the aim of reestablishing the right societal balance, where the police perform their duties and the members of the communities respect and appreciate them (Palmiotto, 2009). This board is important so as both sides can develop peacebuilding skills and processes, which are essential so as to have a multi-stakeholder harmonization of efforts meant to improve the security of the community and members.

This project will aim at a possible program focused on bringing both sides together so that the community (via representatives) can have the opportunity to inform and advise the Chief of the problems and concerns that are in the community. The board, consisting of the members of the community and the police force, will come up with solutions and strategies to address the

problems identified (Scaramella et al., 2011). This will also be a suitable platform for the community to critique the actions and operations of the police department from their viewpoint. The police advisory board has the possibility to help in the development, coordination and facilitation of the police-community activities. Lastly, the relationships that will be formed will improve the police-community relations.

### **Data Collection**

The Conway Police Department has a pro-vision statement that is the guiding statement. The statement reads 'Together building a better community.' My hope is that looking into the benefits of a community advisory board for the police department will help facilitate this vision. The police and the community will have a platform where they can discuss issues affecting them and build a relationship. (Dempsey & Forst, 2010). Having a relationship will help each side learn about and understand the other, and possibly eliminate the existing stereotypes or negative perceptions. The assumption that an advisory board is the answer that the community needs comes from observing the benefits that police departments that have an advisory board reap. Decisions made have mutual benefits, differences are settled amicably, the safety of both parties is enhanced, there is more cohesion in the society and this also makes the police job quite easier (Dempsey & Forst, 2010). In essence, this project is meant to show how coming up with a police advisory board composed of community members can be the solution that irons out the differences between the police force and the members of the state.

In order to understand benefits of advisory board among different agencies, the first step was to collect the policies and procedures for the advisory boards of different agencies in South and North Carolina. I requested these documents from Georgetown Police Department in

Georgetown SC, Richland County Sheriffs Department in Columbia SC, and Asheville Police Department in Asheville NC. Then I conducted interviews at each agency with the highest ranking person in command or their designee. The interview questions were then emailed to all three agencies and consisted of the following questions:

1. What do you see as the pros to having a civilian advisory/review board within your agency?
2. Have you had any obstacles with your program? If so what did you do to work through them?
3. How has your agencies relationship with the community evolved with this program? Improved, damaged etc...
4. What advice would you offer an agency or agency head that may decide to create a similar program within their agency?

We will then examine the different styles of the advisory boards and what those in command believe are the benefits and obstacles with such boards.

### **Operational Definitions of Critical Terms**

Police-community relations are the total of the behaviors and attitudes between the community and the police who serve them (Greene, 2011). They can be either positive or negative depending on the actions of the police since they have the upper hand on many issues in the society.

Public relations are the police-community relations which is the collection of communication techniques used by both individuals and organizations to convince their audience about the merits of an idea, program, policy, and organization (Scaramella et al., 2011). It is meant to convince the intended audience bases on an appeal to reason.

Community service are activities that police engage in prosocial activities that are meant to enhance the community's wellbeing beyond order maintenance and law enforcement (Greene, 2011).

Community participation involves the members of the community taking an active role in helping the police.

### **Data Analysis**

If we look at communities across the country, the Conway Police Advisory board should expect the results that have been observed in other similar boards across the country. One of the boards found that the racial composition of the community is a predictor towards the attitudes that the people have towards the police. The neighborhood context has an important role in understanding the attitudes that the people have against the police (Greene, 2011). Second, residential instability and poverty among the people may reduce their willingness and ability to develop a successful relationship with the police. Some of the poor are often the ones that will feature in jail or crime records and this is not a good foundation for the unity between the two sides. The boards also realized that the frequency of violent crimes in a neighborhood also determines the community's willingness to collaborate with the police.

As a summary of the reasons for the poor relationships between the police and the people, one of the boards came up with three reasons. They are that the citizens have lost confidence in the police's ability to regulate crime, there is now an increased frequency of negative police-community interaction in addition to the low quality of life for the residents.

In April 2016 I spoke with Chief Paul Gardner at Georgetown Police Department in South Carolina via email and phone. Since they are an agency that is similar in size and structure

I felt like their input would greatly assist us in this project. Chief Gardner said that they established a Police Community Advisory Board (PCAB) for their city. They usually meet every month, or every other month depending on their needs at the time. He said he found it helpful when selecting members to include some of the stronger voices in the community in order to get “our message out better”. It was also interesting to note that he said one major thing he did was invite some strong critics of the department to be on the board. He said typically he updates them on the department and takes input from them. He did say that recently he began reviewing complaints filed against officers and how he handled them with the board. He said it was a way for them to be more involved. He said the board and community greatly appreciated this. Chief Gardner did provide me with the following information about their policy and guidelines on how they operate their board:

1. At a minimum, a public opinion survey will be conducted, which will include questions regarding the citizens’ attitudes and opinions in regard to:
  - a) The overall performance of GPD.
  - b) Employee performance.
  - c) Officers’ attitudes and behavior toward citizens.
  - d) Citizen concerns in regard to safety and security.
  - e) Recommendations for improving GPD’s operation.

A written summary of this survey will be provided to the Chief of Police.

2. The Chief of Police shall maintain a Police-Community Advisory Board (PCAB), comprised of citizens appointed by the Chief and each member of City Council (each councilmember may appoint one candidate; the Chief may appoint one candidate for each council-appointed candidate).

3. The goals and purposes of the PCAB program include:

- a) Advise and inform the Chief of problems and concerns from within the community.
- b) Develop solutions and/or strategies with which to address identified problems.
- c) Critique GPD operations from a community standpoint.
- d) Assist in the development, coordination, and facilitation of police-community activities.
- e) Improve police-community relations.

In September 2016 a new Chief was sworn in at Georgetown Police Department. He had previously worked for Georgetown Police Department so I wanted to do a follow-up interview with him to get his input for this paper. On January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017 I spoke with Chief Waites and discussed his thoughts on the Police Community Advisory Board (PCAB). Chief Waites said that he believes strongly in the program the City has, said the board acts as ambassadors to the police department and it helps to bridge the gap you sometimes see between the community and police. It is important to keep the community up to date on what the police department is doing and how they are operating. He said when he met with the board when he first took over as Chief he asked them what their concerns were and what they would like to see improvement on. The board advised him that they do often feel sheltered from information and wanted to be more involved and informed. He said one thing he did to improve this was start to review some use of force videos with the board to show them real life examples of how things evolve start to finish. If a community member came to him with concerns they had heard about an interaction one of his officers had with someone, he would sit down and go over the event and video to explain what



happened and let that member go out and dispel rumors. He also said he started appointing one member to sit on their hiring and promotional board. He said he felt like that was important because they were able to then have stock in assisting with input on who the department hired and promoted.

Chief Waites said the only obstacles he would encourage us to be prepared for is that there are times that you may encounter someone appointed to the board that stops participating or coming to the meetings. He said he does his best to reach out personally and get them back involved, but says at some point the department and board has to make a decision to move on and not let that slow them down. He said the goal is to encourage those that appoint members to seek community members that are diverse and open minded and ready to serve. He said he believes having a program/board similar to this in an agency is important to building partnerships with the community.

In April, I also made contact with Richland County Sheriffs Department (RCSD) in Columbia SC about their program. Initially I spoke with Sgt. Shawn McDaniels and he sent me information on their program. RCSD formed the Citizens' Advisory Council in an effort to increase the department's professional competence and accountability to the citizens of Richland County. It is designed so that the members can review and comment on citizen complaints, disciplinary actions taken against deputies and/or employees, and internal policies and procedures, and then provide the Sheriff with an objective viewpoint. They convene approximately four (4) times a year or as requested by the Sheriff or his designee.

The program states that the duties of the board are the following:

- Review citizens' complaints against deputies and/or employees of the Sheriff's Department.
- Review disciplinary actions against deputies and/or employees of the Sheriff's Department.
- Review internal policies and procedures of the Sheriff's Department.

The Citizens' Advisory Council will then examine each case to determine if they feel the department's actions are justified or unjustified. If the council determines the department/deputy's actions are unjustified, then Internal Affairs will be requested to revisit the case. The Sheriff's Department has the council set up to try and have a diverse cross-section of Richland County residents, to include; ministers, retired military veterans, and community leaders. The Sheriff appoints the members and they serve at his discretion.

In January 2017 I was able to interview Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott via email. Sheriff Lott said that he felt like the benefit of having the council was that it allowed representatives of the diverse community they serve in the county to have a voice in the operations of the department. He said it allows for total transparency. He has not had any obstacles with this program. This program has allowed his agency to develop a two-way trusting relationship with all parts of the community. I asked him what advice he would have for an agency looking to start such a program and he said there is absolutely no reason not to have one. He said as an agency we work for the citizens and they deserve a voice in how their law enforcement agency operates.

Lastly, I located information about the Asheville Police Departments Advisory Committee. The city of Asheville started with an ad hoc police advisory committee made up of 9 members (City Council of the City of Asheville, 2011). The team successfully established communication links between the police department and the community groups. It was able to take note of potentially dangerous incidents and quickly defused them before they became a major problem. The benefits led to the department going forward and forming a permanent council and this is when the Citizen/ Police Advisory Council was made. All members would serve for a two-year term having served on an appointment position for a year. The chair of the Council was appointed by the City Council and he would then select the vice chair and the secretary. Appointments in this Council would always be based on the diversity of the community they are serving.

The duties of the Advisory Council of Asheville (City Council of the City of Asheville, 2011) include:

- Becoming a mediation panel that solves the problems between the police and the community
- Act as an advocate to the programs, methods and ideas that have been brought forth to improve the relationship between the police and the community.
- Serving as a bridge between the community and the police over the concerns that they would have about each other
- Give information needed either to the community or to the government officials.

After every four years, the City Council would review the work of the Advisory Council to determine if there was need for changes in membership or the direction that the Council was

taking and whether it was serving its purpose in the community (City Council of the City of Asheville, 2011).

In January 2017 I interviewed Asheville Deputy Chief Baumstark via email about their program. He said the Asheville Police Department has a Citizen Police Advisory Committee (CPAC) made up of civilians that are appointed by the Asheville City Council. This committee meets once a month with the Chief or her designee. The committee members meet in an open forum. The committee members advise the Chief of any incidents that have occurred in their communities throughout the City. Some comments are in praise of an issue that was resolved successfully, while others reveal real or perceived issues to be looked into and reported back for the committee. This is a great time for the Chief to update the committee on policies or items that the APD is currently undertaking. The information can then be disseminated into the community directly from the committee members. This meeting is also a great time for the community, through the committee members, to have an opportunity to speak directly to the Chief on any issue of concern in their community. At the end of the meeting, members of the public can sign up for a four-minute "public comment." During these four minutes, an individual can comment on what they have heard during the meeting, a concern over what they have observed in the community, or on a subject of their choice. This is only a comment time, not a question and answer time.

As far as any obstacles, DC Baumstark said he would not say that they have had any issues but on an occasion they have had some challenges. The CPAC meetings are open to the public. They encourage public comment to facilitate topics of concern from the community because most of the concerns are either due to miscommunication or all the facts not obtained. After an officer involved shooting, the agency arrested some

members of the public for illegally protesting and occupying the lobby of the police station. CPAC meetings were held in the top level of the building that houses our HQ. For this reason and some other concerns on the location of the meetings, CPAC meetings were moved to a different (non- police) building within the city. The committee also changes and evolves with each new member. These members bring in new ideas and suggestions for possible meeting changes that they believe will enhance the program. As an agency, if the committee approves the change, we support and work towards making the meetings successful.

Overall, DC Baumstark said that the relationship with the community has improved with this program. Most members of CPAC are informal leaders in their communities and some dialog in the meeting is invaluable as information and concerns are shared. They have been able to appropriately reallocate limited resources into communities to alleviate some concerns and fear. He said it is good to have the dialog to get feedback on their performance and how their programs or initiatives are being perceived by the community they serve. He recommended setting up a good structure with representation from active members of diverse groups on the committee. He said these informal community members will help in providing honest feedback to help hear the concerns and issues from the community.

The assessment of Georgetown, Richland and the Asheville police advisory committee shows some similarities that could be a benchmark for the starting of an advisory board for Conway. In essence, the advisory board is not created to take over the functions of the police or the duties of the community members, it is only acting as a mediator and a bridge between the people and the police force for the benefit of both sides.

**Implementation Plan:**

In order to start the process of creating a police advisory board within the Conway Police Department we would need to create an actual proposal. The proposal would include data collected from this project. The administrative division commander and the community services unit would create the proposal. The proposal would focus on setting up an ad hoc advisory board just like Asheville did and then observe and assess the role it plays and the benefits got from it. After the assessment once a predetermined timeline has elapsed, then the permanent advisory board could be formed, provided it is fulfilling the purposes for which it was set up. At this point the proposal would be presented to the command staff (to include the Chief) to discuss any possible changes that needed to be made. Then the Chief would present the proposal to the City Administrator, and then with City Council. It is estimated that getting the proposal written, approved and presented to council could take possibly two months.

Once we had approval from the necessary parties to move forward we could then create a more detailed plan. At this point, we would determine what the guidelines would be and all of these would require open discussion with city staff and council. It would be critical for the ad hoc board to make sure we selected board members that could be identified from input from staff and council. These members would need to be respected within the community, but also be honest and open with department leaders with their concerns, at the same time being people that are willing to work towards solutions and be active. This would assist us with overcoming any obstacles with members that would not be active and could potentially not be open minded to the different ideas that may evolve. This process could take up to a month to make sure we select the right board members and coordinate schedules.

Once the board is selected, we would need to set up training for all members on the guidelines and responsibilities of the board. There would be potential costs in this portion because we would want to provide a few meetings to work on this and it helps to make it a working lunch/dinner. This way the members can be in a relaxed setting, sharing a meal, and learning more about the program and each other. We could allocate \$800 for these meetings and meals, but also seek someone that may want to donate the meals for the community cause to offset costs. We would also want to educate the community before the board started being active within the community. This could potentially involve advertisements and discussions on local television, radio stations and public meetings. The focus during these campaigns and education sessions should be on the importance of having an advisory board, as it is the first step towards reducing violence and brutality in the community. Once the people are educated, they will understand those on the board are liaisons that could lead to a better community. This portion of the plan could potentially take another two months to begin to lay the proper foundation. Overall, it could potentially take up to five months to get the actual ad hoc advisory board in motion as a component of the police department.

The potential resources we have available to assist with this process starts with our local clergy of all denominations and groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). We have already established partnerships with the community members that we could build on. Over the years, we have also collaborated with businesses to host meals/coffee with the department and community and we could continue to reach out to these organizations to do the same. In addition, we discussed educating the public through the media and we could reach out to our local media that we have partnerships with and request they assist us without any fees for advertisement.

During this entire process, it would be key to keep the city staff updated on what is discussed at each meeting and what actions have been taken. We could then also discuss this same information at community meetings held throughout the year.

### **Evaluation Method**

Data collection methods that will be used to monitor the results will include conducting interviews with the citizens and the police officers. The board will call a few members from both sides to give an account of the progress they have seen. Their responses will then be tabulated, and the results showed in graphs or in figures to make them measurable. These tabulations will give a measure of the effectiveness of the board and its efforts. Prior to the survey, the advisory team must meet with the Chief to discuss its intentions, procedures, policies and practices regarding their collection of data. The report and its recommendations will be presented to the department Chief

### **Summary and Recommendations**

Overall, the new collaboration through the police advisory board is expected to produce favorable results. There will be reduced crimes, increased feelings of safety, increased community capacity, reduced disorder, and anti-social behavior and changed attitudes of both the police officers and the community. It will also improve the community relations and perceptions besides increasing their capacity to be proactive in making their community safer.

The proposed solutions to these problems include acknowledging and holding discussions with the community on the challenges that the police are facing in their line of duty. The controversial use of force or a single act of misconduct by a single officer may have damaging effects for the entire force (Miller, Hess & Orthmann, 2013). Both the community and the police



should be transparent and accountable. When an incidence occurs, each side should give as much truthful information as is possible and take the blame where due. This way, neither side will feel like information is being withheld. Faced with facts, they will both make better decisions. Third, the society as a whole should take the time to reduce bias and improve on cultural competency (Dempsey & Forst, 2010). To this respect, the officers ought to receive training on diversity, cultural competency and implicit bias to understand the diversities of the people they are serving. It would help if the police department itself became more diverse in terms of race and other demographics. Fourth, the collaboration of the police and the community should be considered important and hence be made visible to the community.

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